



Importance of democracy in India's connect Central Asia policy

Smrutirekha Sahu

Department of Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

India and Central Asia shares significant cultural, civilizational and historic linkages. India's Connect Central Asia (CAA) policy of 2012 is a comprehensive framework that encompasses political, cultural, economic, and security connections. The main objective of the Connect Central Asia initiative was to establish renewed ties with a region that has a significant historical connection to India. It covers a wide range of significant issues, such as regional connectivity, information technology (IT), political collaboration, economic cooperation, strategic cooperation, cooperation in education, medical cooperation, regional grouping cooperation, and people-to-people contacts. This article outlines the growing significance of India's relations with Central Asia Republics. What is need to be discussed in this relationship is the establishment of democratic governance in the Central Asian region. Because, democratic values are less discussed in their agreement and cooperation. Given the democracy in Central Asia, the five Central Asian countries are struggling under authoritarian regimes in practice despite they have adopted democratic principles in their country's constitution. The study critically inquire democratic practices in the five Central Asian countries. Furthermore, India has emerged a recognised democracy worldwide. In this context, the paper is emphasising upon the importance of democracy in India's Connect Central Asia Policy. The argument presented here is sharing democratic values and best practices of democratic governance of India through its Connect Central Asia Policy will strengthen India and Central Asia long standing relationship.

Keywords: India, Central Asia, democracy, democratic governance, cooperation

Introduction

India has a longstanding history of relationships with Central Asia, as the Central Asian states were previously part of the Soviet Union, with which India enjoyed very strong links. India's relationship with this region seemed to be weakening with the fall of the Soviet Union. The five nations of Central Asia are well-endowed with hydroelectric resources and are rich in minerals including oil and natural gas. Uzbekistan has significant deposits of gold, uranium, and gas; Kazakhstan is the second-largest producer of uranium in the world; Turkmenistan has the fourth-largest natural gas reserves; Tajikistan has enormous hydropower potential; and Kyrgyzstan has abundant hydroelectric resources and rich in gold. India and Central Asia have worked in energy, security, defense, trade and investment, development, and soft power. Cultural exchange has been promoted successfully between both the regions.

A thorough analysis of the constitutions of the five Central Asian Republics reveals that they all share essential characteristics of democracies. These characteristics include secularism, a multi-party system, regular elections, universal suffrage for adults, and a clear mechanism for separating executive and legislative power. Yet the practice of democracy failed to take roots in their political culture. The paper is dealing with on this area. Democracy and democratic governance in the India's Connect Central Asia Policy is an important area to focus. Although the Central Asian region has deliberately modelled its political institutions on a delicate balance between historically authoritative traditions and modern day institutions, the region's democratic process must be studied in the context of a larger geopolitical framework, in which India's track as a successful democracy is important. The research is a qualitative study. It is based on descriptive, analytical and deductive method. It critically examines promotion of

democracy in Central Asia, and helps India to share its democratic culture.

There are a variety of academic studies that provide scholarly support for India's Connect Central Asia Policy. But this study will provide a comprehensive approach to include democracy and democratic governance in India's connect central Asia policy. As an emerging democracy, India should consider democracy as a factor for its strategic relationship with Central Asia. Therefore the main arguments of this study is why democracy is important in India's Connect Central Asia Policy and how sharing democratic values will help to strengthen their relationship? Democratic culture should spread from one nation to other. In this aspect, the paper will conclude with the future development in India- Central Asia relationship focussing on the sharing democratic culture.

The study has taken forward by four sections. In the first section, the study examines why Central Asia is important for the great and small powers. The second section look into India- Central Asia relationship while explaining the significance of central Asia for India. This further highlights India's Connect Central Asia Policy and its objectives. The third section critically analyses political culture of Central Asia, where it examines whether democracy is being practiced in this region. The final section provide an overview of Indian democracy and the importance of democracy in Its Connect Central Asia Policy.

Strategic position of Central Asia

Central Asia is a huge region that stretches from the Russian border in the north to the Iranian and Afghani borders in the south, and from the Chinese border in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west. Since the days of the Silk Route, Central Asia has held great importance for conquerors and merchants (Dar, 2014) ^[5]. Central Asia is strategically

located in the center of both Asia and Eurasia. It connects Asia and Europe by acting as a bridge between Eastern and Western nations. It now serves as a bridge connecting North and South and East and West. Central Asia's strategic location has made it an important focal point of geopolitical and geo-economic competition. Mackinder included Central Asia in Eurasia, which is a crucial region of the world in terms of geostrategic importance, when he drew the heartland boundaries (Kurecic, 2010) [18]. This area has been a center for both the Grate Game and the New Grate Game because of its strategic location. These nations are taking advantage of their shared history, culture, and geopolitical prominence to gain supremacy over Central Asia's energy resources (Fatima & Zafar, 2020) [6]. The region is rich in oil and other natural resources which attracts external powers.

Smaller nations like Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are interfering in the region to promote their own benefits, while chief powers like the United States, European Union, Russia, China, and Japan aim to obtain a stronghold and control the flow of oil and gas deposits in Central Asia. One of the key concerns in 21st-century politics is swiftly emerging as influence over these reserves of energy and transport channels out of the Eurasian heartland (Khan, 2006) [14]. So, in order to keep control of the crucial location in Central Asia along with its oil and gas deposits, each major actor in this geopolitical conflict plans to deter opponents and fortify their positions (Dar, 2014) [5]. Due to the increase in global demand for oil and gas and the decline in supply in other parts of the world, it is becoming a more important geopolitical location in international affairs.

India-Central Asia relationship

Before the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva were absorbed into the Romanov Empire, there were significant historical connections between the Central Asia and Indian subcontinent. Since the soviet era, more cultural exchanges has taken place between India and Central Asian nations, and Indian culture and cinema gained widespread acclaim in the Central Asian republics throughout the Soviet era (Singh, 1995) [29]. Since 1991, India has made a consistent effort to forge close political ties with all the nations of central Asia. The most frustrating aspect of its whole political connections with the region, however, has been its economic and trading connections. Both sides made several significant official visit to strengthen their political ties between India and Central Asia. The visit of Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi to all the five Central Asian countries in 2015, strengthened the relationship further.

India's emphasis on this area remained mostly depressing and underdeveloped for many years. Due to the long-standing animosity between New Delhi and Islamabad, there is a severe lack of trust between the two countries, which jeopardizes intra-regional political and economic engagement. Indian leaders are concerned about China's 'peaceful rise' and increasingly powerful stance (Kuszevska, 2020, p. 21) [19]. As a result, New Delhi seeks to enhance its influence in global affairs and actively engages in shaping a multipolar emerging global order. However, given the region's growing geopolitical and strategic importance to India in recent years, New Delhi has focused on the region while developing its foreign policy (Pradhan, 2022) [25]. Despite the fact that there is no direct land connection

between India and the Central Asian States, India has made the region a priority in its strategic policy of "Going North" in order to gain access to the region's energy resources, lessen Pakistan's influence, and strengthen India's position as a major players while carrying relationship with other external powers within the region (Dar, 2014) [5]. To pursue its global aspirations despite the challenging geopolitical dynamics with China and Pakistan, the two of which pose obstacles to India's broader strategic objectives, New Delhi has turned its attention to Central Asia (Moore, 2007) [21]. By establishing security, economic, energy, and strategic partnerships, both regions have been further enhanced positive relationships (Pradhan, 2018) [24]. All five of the Central Asian republics and India currently share a very strong and profound connection.

Central Asia is an important element of India's extended neighborhood with centuries-old friendships and a great deal of support for India, and it has become the subject of India's growing engagement there. Due to the increasing security concerns in and surrounding Afghanistan, the Central Asia has become more significant in the strategic landscape. On the other hand, Afghanistan appears as an economic link between Central and South Asia, and a major national interests for India is to keep it away from turning into an epicenter of terrorism and extremism. Since India and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have a joint working group mechanism on counterterrorism, these three nations are regarded as being of great importance for India. Additionally, India and the Central Asia Republics have extensive defense and security connections, which strengthens their strategic alliance (Roy, 2013) [26]. India introduced the Connect Central Asia policy in 2012 to increase the relationship between India and Central Asia region. This includes a comprehensive plan to broaden and strengthen India's ties to the area, which calls for more frequent exceptional visits, the formation of strategic alliances, comprehensive economic involvement, inventive connectivity solutions, and collaboration on the development of the energy and natural resources of Central Asia. A proposal for an e-network is also included in the plan, with the goal of providing the people of Central Asia with access to tele-education and telemedicine.

India's Connect Central Asia Policy

India's goal is to establish a sustainable cooperative partnership with the Central Asia Republics, hence the country has stepped up its engagement with the area in a more targeted method. India declared its new "Connect Central Asia" policy in 2012 with the intention of realizing this objective and forging closer relations with the Eurasian area. This policy is built on dedicated political, economic, and interpersonal relationships with Central Asian nations (Roy, 2013) [26]. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, is credited with coming up with the concept of "Connect Central Asia," which is thought to herald in a new age and dynamic vision in the relations between both the regions (Pradhan, 2018) [24]. This is a holistic approach to strategy that covers political, economic, and cultural partnerships between India and Central Asia.

India's Connect Central Asia' policy, brought to the implementation under the new catchphrase of the four Cs that is 'Commerce, Connectivity, Consular, and Community'. India has also begun a yearly Track -II program called the India-Central Asia Dialogue to keep in

connected with the region as well as get all central Asian countries together on a single platform for greater understanding. India's new approach to policy is an effort to strengthen its recently restored ties with the whole Eurasian area. Its many elements include boosting India's participation in strategic, economic, political, and educational domains as well as in people to people contacts, connectivity, and culture. Given the geographical constraints, India's "soft power" strategy may be able to open the door for further cooperation, as is seen in its "Connect Central Asia" program. According to New Delhi's 'Connect Central Asia' policy, this aspect of the country's Central Asian policy is seen as a crucial one for building strategic alliances. Enhancing India's economic relations with the area is another crucial aspect of the "Connect Central Asia Policy" that deserves emphasis. An effort is being made to increase India's multilateral interaction with the region (Roy, 2013) ^[26].

The connection between India and Central Asia has further taken on fresh dynamism as a result of the Prime Minister's excellent trip to the landlocked region in July 2015. His five-nation journey was intended to increase India's regional influence in the inner Asian nations through cooperation for economic growth. For the first time, Prime Minister Modi's engagement with Central Asia has spanned a wide range of topics, from trade and commerce to security and counterterrorism to collaboration in the fields of health care and pharmaceuticals, as well as energy relations, pipeline politics, trade, and transportation (Pradhan, 2018) ^[24]. However, there has been improvement recently in January, 2022, culminating in the inaugural India-Central Asia Summit held in online mode.

What is missing here is the sharing the best practices of governance with these country. Sharing best practices, social and political development, and successful model of governance is essential components of any interregional cooperation in International relations. India is considered as the world's largest democracy, where Central Asia is struggling to adopt democratic principles due to the internal chaos and external presence in the regions. Given this India's Connect Central Asia Policy, accommodating 'democracy' will strengthen India-Central Asia relationship. Hence, the following sections are critically analysing the democratic practices in the five Central Asia republics, and the importance of democracy in India's Connect Central Asian Policy.

Democracy and Political culture in Central Asia

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan became independent nations. The five Central Asian countries introduced liberal economic principles and democratic political standards. These nations adhere to universal democratic values, which are enshrined in their national constitutions, such as respect for human rights, parliamentary elections, the institution of the office of president, and the superiority of international law. There are currently free elections, multiparty systems, and parliaments in all of the Central Asian states. In this respect, it appears that the Central Asian countries have met the initial obstacle of the conceptual framework constituting democratic governance (Kukeyeva & Shkapyak, 2013) ^[17]. However, in reality, international organizations have criticized central Asian democracy for not upholding all democratic

principles. Additionally, these governments have repressed and restricted freedom of the press, expression, and speech (Sahu, 2018) ^[27]. The positions of the presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are being steadily strengthened.

Kyrgyzstan implemented a liberalization strategy during the post-independence era. However, the Kyrgyz Republic's full transition was challenging because of economic challenges and ongoing attempts by power-hungry politicians to overthrow freshly formed governments. Kyrgyzstan is known as the 'Island of democracy' in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan switched to a parliamentary system of government in 2005 and 2010 following two revolutions that overthrew autocratic leaders. However, governing coalitions have proven fragile, and corruption is still rampant. Political turmoil was severe as a result of the unrest around the invalid 2020 parliamentary elections, and nationalist politician Sadyr Japarov's opponents were brutally suppressed. Prominent constitutional revisions enacted in 2021 significantly increased the president's power, concentrating political control in his hands and reducing the size and role of parliament. Political opponents and critics of civil society are being silenced using both vigilante violence and the judicial system. The super-presidential system was reinstated in Kyrgyzstan by the constitution, which was ratified in May 2021. A variety of administrative issues, including as disparities in vote counts and the restriction of independent journalists from poll monitoring, were present during the November 2021 parliamentary elections. Under Japarov's direct direction, the parliament approved new law in 2021 on "false information" (Freedom House, 2023) that to restrict content that is deemed "false" by authorities.

The Nations in Transit 2023 report classifies Kazakhstan as having a Consolidated Authoritarian system. Nursultan Nuzarbayev was the president of Kazakhstan since 1991, the disintegration of the Soviet Union. He has been known as an autocratic ruler. Under his rule the political system of Kazakhstan has been witnessing a repressing government, where no freedom of press, violations of human rights, high level of corruptions exists. In 2019, he resigned and his ally Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Tokayev elected as the president. A legislative election was held in March, 2023 which brought positive changes to the politics and society of Kazakhstan. The legislative body, which was formerly little more than a rubber stamp, is now a forum for debate and occasionally even critics of the government. Broad constitutional reforms were carried out. Independent candidates were able to run in the election for the first time. Additionally, new political parties emerged. The candidate addressed on both political and domestic matters. Despite all the loosened reforms, the ruling Amanat party obtained a majority (Abishev, 2023) ^[11] by irregularities such as voter list manipulation, group and proxy voting, and ballot box manipulation. Opposition parties have a hard time getting elected to parliament due to electoral restrictions. At all levels of government, corruption is pervasive and charges against journalists, activists, and members of the opposition are often huge. In the 2022 demonstration against the high price of oil, thousands of people were detained, and numerous nonviolent protesters were arbitrarily held, subjected to torture, and deprived of access to legal counsel (Freedom House, Kazakhstan, 2023). Further, there are severe restrictions on press freedom.

Uzbekistan adopted a mixed-path policy. Uzbekistan experienced a successful economic transition thanks to a political system with a touch of traditionalism, promising leadership, and national unification. Since Mirziyoyev became president in 2016, though several issues have improved, Uzbekistan is still an authoritarian nation with no evidence of democratization. Although there has been a minor decrease in media repression since Mirziyoyev came to power, domestic media, especially news outlets and live television shows, now carefully examine social concerns and criticize local politicians (Freedom House, 2023). There are no legitimate opposition parties and the media are still under close government control.

Tajikistan adheres to democracy through democratic problem-solving for the state and society. Akulova asserts, democracy-based concepts were used to build the country's overall sense of peace. Uzbeks, Kirghiz, Turkmen, Russians, Russian-speaking people, and other nationalities coexist with Tajiks in Tajikistan (Akulova, 2010) ^[2]. According to Melton, the ruling family in Tajikistan practices nepotistic autocracy, suppressing the media, imprisoning human rights campaigners, banning the opposition, limiting the activities of specific religious organisations, and repressing civil society. Tajikistan has recently chosen not to participate in OSCE human rights discussions. Public rallies and assemblies are prohibited, and there is a growing restriction on journalistic freedom (Melton, 2023) ^[20]. Political freedoms and civil liberties are severely curtailed under President Emomali Rahmon's authoritarian regime, which has been in power since 1992 (Freedom House, 2022). The president and his family hold an ever-increasing amount of power and wealth.

The term "totalitarian state" is often used to describe Turkmenistan. The fundamental liberties of citizens, including equal protection, freedom from discrimination, and due process, are protected by the constitution in the document. However, the Constitution does not ensure efficient implementation (Al-Bassam, 1997) ^[3]. Turkmenistan lacks the fundamental elements of democracy and pluralism; there is no election of officials, no freedom of speech, no freedom to form public organizations, no freedom of conscience, and no clearly defined division of powers, despite the fact that all of these rights are guaranteed by the country's current Constitution (Oskina, 2014) ^[22]. According to the Freedom House report of 2023, elections are heavily regulated, which the president and his allies win almost all of the time under repressive regime of Turkmenistan. The government controls the economy, and corruption is widespread. A non-competitive election was held in March 2022 to elect Serdar Berdimuhamedov. The new regulations prohibited women from using certain accessories, wearing tight clothing, and coloring their hair. Women are no longer permitted to drive on their own, cosmetic surgery is illegal, and male drivers are no longer permitted to carry non-family female passengers. There are serious limitations on press freedom (Freedom House, 2023). There are frequent instances of people being denied access to international travel.

The authoritarian regime, weakened institutions, extreme poverty, and corruption all impede the growth of democracy in Central Asia. Delegation of authority, where all members of a community might participate in any governance or decision-making processes on an equal basis, was not a part of the region's historical governance experience. As a result,

the governments of the Central Asian states adopted a specific type of "from above" democracy, failing to include the citizens and restricting their participation in political processes. Hence, the 'Asian model of democratization' was followed by all five Central Asian governments. The ideal method for facilitating the transition of Central Asian countries to democracy, according to proponents of authoritarian regimes, is balanced and rational authoritarianism. The quality of democratic institutions and procedures, however, is significantly impacted by the extension of presidential powers, which results in lessened access, election participation, the rule of law, and honesty. Additionally, these cultures either repress or severely restrict conventional democratic freedom and liberties (Kukeyeva & Shkapyak, 2013) ^[17]. The reason can be insufficient support of democracy reforms in the region. To support democracy India must come forward with its Connect Central Asia Policy. The following section provides justification to the above statement.

Incorporating Democratic assistance in India's Connect Central Asia Policy

The universal principles such as multi-party system, public involvement, accountability, transparency, the rule of law, human rights, separation of powers, free and fair elections an independent judiciary, and political tolerance are at the heart of any healthy democracy. Democracy in India is characterized by its widespread adult suffrage, periodic elections, protection of free speech, and independent judiciary. There are flaws in India's democratic system, but overall, the country is becoming a model for other developing democracies.

India is the world's largest democracy, with vibrant and diverse political system. The Indian government is a parliamentary federal democracy. The state is headed by a president, while the government is governed by a prime minister, who is the real executive. India holds regular free and fair elections at all level. The election commission of India is independent and transparent. Indian political system is a multi-party system, where people elect the government and reject the government. Opposition parties are independent to keep their opinion. The constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to its citizens, including freedom of speech, expression, assembly, religion, and the right to vote. The parliament makes laws without violating these fundamental rights. In Indian democracy, Judiciary plays an independent role. It is based on rule of law. It checks and balance parliament and the activities of the authorities and secure citizen's rights. India has a vibrant media landscape, including print media, broadcast, and online platforms. Freedom of press is respected, allowing wide range of public opinion. Academic writings are respected. Civil society works freely in advocating for social causes and contributing to policy debates. Although democracy in India faces several challenges like corruption, social inequality, gender inequality, regional disparities, identity politics and communal tensions, the supreme constitutions and strong mechanism constantly working on these issues to maintain democratic culture of the nation. Despite these challenges, the democratic spirit of participation and debate remains a defining characteristics of India's political landscape.

The nation's elections are highly competitive, extensively welcoming, efficiently managed by experts, and

incorporated into a dynamic and active political arena (Parthasarathy & Rao, 2017) ^[23]. A wide range of institutions, including executive branches, legislatures, courts, police, regulatory agencies, bureaucracy, independent statutory bodies, commissions of inquiry, development organizations, and more, ensure the legitimacy of the Indian state and ensure its accountability (Mehta, 2012). The government officials and public servants in India are penalized for corruption under Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. The Right to Information Act, 2005 empowers citizens to secure access to information from government offices and promote transparency and accountability of public authority. By creating a federal system that gives political authority to Indians who speak multiple languages, the country of India was able to improve its democracy. Incorporating lower castes and a wide range of grassroots activities through the development of local government is indicative of the development and consolidation of democracy (Kohli, 2001, p. 19) ^[16]. In India, there is ample room for expressing political dissent and protest as well as free and active media, assembly, and association rights. Even the Congress, the country's first national party, which resembled a dynasty as time went on, has already been ousted from power and replaced by opponents (Kohli, 2001, p. 3) ^[16]. The ruling party is changing at centre level, and influence of different regional parties at the state level are the symbol of a strong democracy in India.

With the above analysis of Indian democracy, it is clear that many developing countries especially Central Asia should consider to follow the Indian model of democratic governance. The pattern of collaboration and shared interests is demonstrated by a variety of innovative practices that have been introduced in India. Government representatives and groups representing specific interests, such as the FICCI or the CII, chambers of business, and to a lesser extent civil society organizations, often confer and negotiate. Partnership doesn't just refer to the government advancing corporate interests. It is also anticipated that business interests would contribute to the welfare of society and economic growth (Joseph, 2007) ^[13]. Affirmative actions are implemented to protect minorities and the underprivileged. These innovations in Indian democracy can set an inspiration for Central Asia's politics and economy.

Many western countries aspire to promote liberal democracy in Central Asian region. However, promoting democracy in Central Asia is difficult due to the region's strong authoritarian environment and the skepticism of regional powers, such as Russia and China, against Western countries' ambitions to promote liberal democracy in their immediate neighborhood. The European Union and the United States are actively working to advance democratic values in the region through politically conditional development aid and a normative discourse with regional governments. 'Non-Western conceptions of democracy and substitute models of government' are what Russia and China are said to be advocating. China's position in Central Asia undermines western influence and promotion of democracy in that region. For authoritarian regimes in Central Asia that are hesitant to completely embrace liberal democracy and a liberal market economy, China's impressive economic success and growing political influence against the backdrop of its authoritarian internal policies and market-command economy serve as an attractive example (Sharshenova &

Crawford, 2017) ^[28]. Leaders from Central Asia frequently assert that their nation's historical development is distinct from that of other areas and that Central Asian principles cannot be compared to those of the West when talking about democracy.

The United States and European nations anticipate India to support democratic governance in the area given the unstable conditions in the majority of its neighbors. The Indian government, however, has not yet expressed a desire to use such an approach in its foreign policy (Faust & Wagner, 2010) ^[7]. India cannot think of promoting democracy because of its commitment to the non-intervention and non-interference principles. However, India can shared democratic principle, shared its democratic best practices, and support the democracy in Central Asia.

Even while India is reluctant to take on a prominent role in advancing democracy alongside Western nations, it has significantly contributed to the spread of democracy in its own special ways. India's flourishing democracy demonstrates that democracy can thrive in a very intricate and challenging post-colonial culture. Another fallacy that development cannot occur in a democratic emerging nation has been disproved by India's recent tremendous economic progress (Choedon, 2015) ^[4]. Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India stressed the same point at the inaugural ceremony of the UN Democracy Fund. He stated, *"Poverty, illiteracy or socio-economic backwardness do not hinder the exercise of democracy. Quite the contrary, our experience of more than 50 years of democratic rule demonstrates how democracy is a most powerful tool to successfully overcome the challenge of development. But most of all, democracy alone gives the assurance that the developmental aspirations of the poorest citizens of our society will be taken into consideration"* (Singh M. 2005) ^[30]. Further, Prime Minister Singh emphasized that India would provide assistance once "requested". India, which embraced a "top-down" strategy, implements democratic assistance by collaborating and coordinating with the governmental structures. India also saw the democracy assistance as a beneficial way to show support for underdeveloped nations (Choedon, 2015) ^[4]. India also aspires to advance commerce, encourage business opportunities, guarantee a continuous supply of energy, and advance its strategic interests through democratic assistance. The recognition of India as a future great power and the development of its reputation as a responsible global citizen are both promoted by democracy assistance. India would be able to strengthen its soft power, which has become a valuable asset in the globalized world for influencing international relations. However, when compared to Western nations involved in the same endeavour, India's approach and method for encouraging and supporting democracy varies substantially. India has provided democratic assistance through providing EVM, exporting election ink etc. India doesn't believe in promoting any ideology in terms of democracy. Having said that Central Asia reject the western model of democracy, India can see an opportunity to support the best political practices through its soft attitude of sharing democratic culture and democratic assistance. To make it possible India must include democracy as an elements in its Connect Central Asia Policy. Moreover, Central Asian countries must realise the importance of democracy as an area of cooperation with its historically close friend India.

Conclusion

The study suggests that India should use its position being world's largest democracy and include democracy in its Connect Central Asia Policy. India believes in peaceful coexistence and promoting harmony with her external partners. India is known as a peace seeker nation. This statement best suits when we see the current Russia-Ukraine war, in which India has maintained her neutral position and requesting for the peace. Therefore, India must share her democratic principles with soft policy. While all Central Asian regimes often concentrate on problems with internal as well as external security and stability, they either opt to totally ignore or pay only a minimum amount of attention to difficulties with democracy. However, if these nations want to be seen as recognized and members of the international community, they must put democratization problems high on their political agendas and endeavour to build democratic institutions in their societies. It is found from the above analysis that India is a safe partner for Central Asia to its openness towards solving democratization issues. Both India and Central Asia regions are emerging strategic partners in many areas. They must share democratic values together and strengthen their strategic partnership. From the Indian perspective, incorporating democracy in India's Connect Central Asia policy will open the path for providing democratic assistance, sharing best practices of governance and spreading democratic culture in Central Asian region. It will further strengthen the old friendship between India and Central Asia, which will ultimately lead to a strong position of India globally. From the Central Asian perspective, accommodating democracy in its relationship with India will promote good governance, best suited democratic principles, social advancement, economic growth, and international recognition.

References

1. Abishev G. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 12 April 2023. [Internet]. [Cited 2023 Apr 12]. Available from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/89513>
2. Akulova M. The world democracy and Tajikistan. Russia and the moslem world, 2010;222(12):59–65.
3. Al-Bassam K. The evolution of authoritarianism in Turkmenistan. Demokratizatsiya. 1997;5(3):386–405.
4. Choedon Y. India and democracy promotion: cautious approach and opportunity. India Quarterly, 2015;71(2):160–173.
5. Dar S. Strategic Significance of Central Asia in 21st Century. The Journal of Central Asian Studies, 2014;21(1):59.
6. Fatima Q, Zafar S. New Great Game: Players, Interests, Strategies and Central Asia. South Asian Studies, 2020, 29(2).
7. Faust J, Wagner C. India: A new partner in democracy promotion? Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE): 2010.
8. Freedom House. Tajikistan. Freedom House, 2022.
9. Freedom House. Kazakhstan. Freedom House, 2023.
10. Freedom House. Kyrgyzstan. Freedom House, 2023.
11. Freedom House. Turkmenistan. Freedom House, 2023.
12. Freedom House. Uzbekistan. Freedom House, 2023.
13. Joseph S. Neoliberal reforms and democracy in India. Economic and Political Weekly, 2007:3213–3218.
14. Khan A. Central Asia: Centre of New Great Game. The Dialogue, 2006;1(4):57–82.
15. Kharkongor M. indianstrategicknowledge, 2014. [Internet]. [Cited 2023 May 21]. Available from: https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/paper_84.pdf
16. Kohli A. Introduction. In: Kohli A, Breman J, Hawthorn G, editors. The success of India's democracy. Cambridge University Press: 2001.
17. Kukeyeva F, Shkapyak O. Central Asia's Transition to Democracy. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2013, 79–83.
18. Kurecic P. The New Great Game: Rivalry of Geostrategies and Geoeconomies in Central Asia. Croatian Geographical Bulletin, 2010, 72(1).
19. Kuszewska A. Prospects, Threats and Challenges of India's "Connect Central Asia" Policy in the Current International Security Context'. In: Kashif KH, editor. The Strategy of (Re) connectivity. New Delhi: KW Publisher, 2020, 21–38.
20. Melton J. Democratization from below: Civil society in Tajikistan. Public Administration & Development, 2023;43(1):38–48.
21. Moore S. Peril and promise: a survey of India's strategic relationship with Central Asia. Central Asian Survey, 2007;26(2):279–291.
22. Oskina O. Political Elite of Turkmenistan: Traditions and Prospects. Russia and the moslem world, 2014;270(12):51–60.
23. Parthasarathy R, Rao V. Worldbank. March 2017. [Internet]. [Cited 2017 Mar]. Available from: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5d00d480-7711-513c-9ec0-3b8bce35949c/content>
24. Pradhan R. India's Expanding Interests IN Central Asia: Policies, issues and challenges. central EURASIAN journal, 2018, 80.
25. Pradhan R. Energy geopolitics and the new great game in Central Asia. Millennial Asia, 2022;13(2):265–288.
26. Roy M. India's 'Connect Central Asia' Policy: Building Cooperative Partnership. Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 2013;8(3):301–316.
27. Sahu S. A comparative study of democracy and media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, 1991–2010. M.Phil Dissertation. Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2018.
28. Sharshenova A, Crawford G. Undermining Western democracy promotion in Central Asia: China's countervailing influences, powers and impact. Central Asian Survey, 2017;36(4):453–472.
29. Singh A. India's relations with Russia and Central Asia. International Affairs. 1995;71(1):69–81.
30. Singh M. Government of India. September 14, 2005. [Internet]. [Cited 2005 Sep 14]. Available from: <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=187>